

July 17, 1967

SOVIET BLUNDER THAT LED TO MIDEAST WAR: THE INSIDE STORY

WASHINGTON—It now is definitely established by authoritative sources that a major Soviet blunder led to the Arab-Israeli war early in June.

The Soviet Government, to further its purposes, faked intelligence reports—supplying those reports to the Governments of Egypt and Syria—that Israel was massing troops to attack Syria.

The Soviet purpose, these sources say, was political and somewhat limited. Russia hoped to create a crisis atmosphere that would unite the Arab nations, cause them to stop their squabbling and work together more closely.

The goal was not war against Israel by the Arabs.

A move that backfired. Russians, though, had not reckoned with their Arabs. Egypt's President Gamal Abdel Nasser quickly became excited. Troops began to maneuver in the Sinai Desert.

to back away, warning him that, if war came, he would get no military help from the Soviet Union.

One meeting between Nasser and the Soviet Ambassador in Cairo was at 3:30 a.m.

But it was too late. Say the informed sources: Nasser and the Syrians either believed the faked intelligence reports—or wanted to believe them.

A help to LBJ. This entire sequence of events was said to have been known to President Johnson in Washington as it developed.

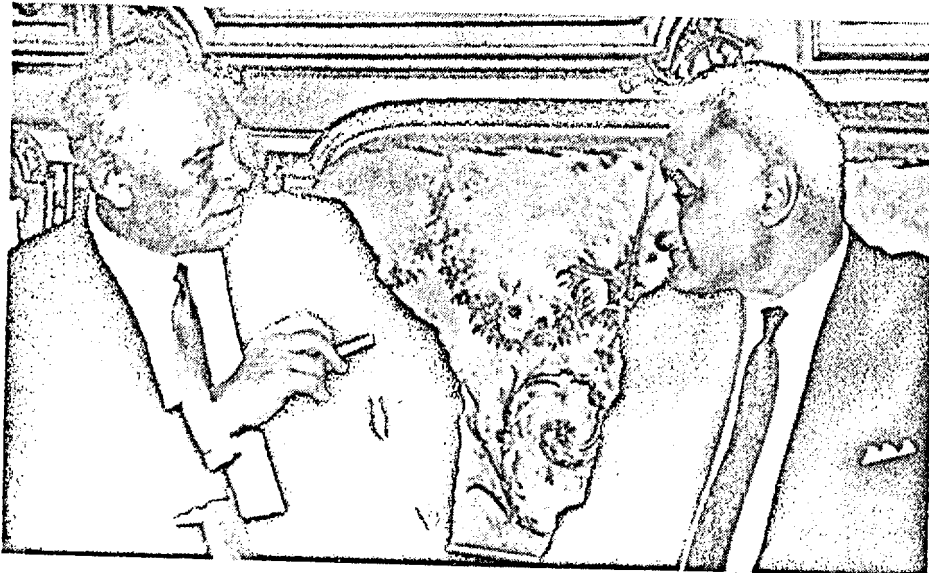
Knowing what had happened, those on the inside say, President Johnson was able to play it cautiously, confident that developments would not bring Russia into a full-scale Mideastern war on the side of the Arabs.

U. S. military judgment had been that, if war did come, Israel would win in a

cern, however, that Russian intelligence was so poor or so badly misused and that the Russians have created so-called 'strong men' around the world who cannot be controlled by them.

"Nasser is only one. Fidel Castro in Cuba is another.

"Not even the Russians know what men of this type will do with the Russian arms supplied them."



—UPI Photo

AFTERMATH OF DEFEAT—Soviet President Podgorny, in Cairo, criticized Nasser for moving too quickly. But a Russian miscalculation is now being blamed for war.

The Russians, however, still thought at this point that the situation could be handled. They believed that they could control their Mideastern allies.

Then, the sources report, Nasser made the move that his Soviet sponsors had not figured on—ordering a blockade of the Gulf of Aqaba. Israel had made no secret of the fact that this move would be considered an act of war. Why? Because the action severed a vital line of supply.

The Russians now had lost control. They sought frantically to induce Nasser

relatively short time, not giving Russia an opportunity to intervene, even if the Kremlin changed its mind and decided to do so.

"Hot line" messages from Moscow, advising the President that the Russians would not intervene, merely corroborated what the President already knew.

Conclusion—a worry. Diplomatic sources who reveal this story now also draw a worried conclusion:

"It is heartening that American diplomatic and military intelligence was so good in this crisis. There is reason for con-